

SUBJECT: Media Relations	NUMBER: 2-32.02
EFFECTIVE DATE:	REVIEW DATE:
NMMLEPSC STANDARDS: ADM.23.01, ADM.23.02, ADM.23.03 OPR.15.01	APPROVED: <i>JB</i> Sheriff <i>12/01/11</i>

I. POLICY

Positive media relations are an integral part of the operation of any public service agency; the Valencia County Sheriff's Office is no exception. Most citizens have little contact with sheriff's deputies and their opinion of the deputies and the sheriff's office is often formed by the mass media's portrayal of its functions. The maintenance of good press relations is therefore a crucial element of public relations. Deputies and employees must maintain good rapport with the media and deal with them in a courteous and impartial manner. It must be remembered that the media has a legitimate function in our society and the public trust of the agency can be enhanced through proper dealings with the media.

II. RULES AND REGULATIONS

A. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

1. It will be the responsibility of the public information officer, as designated by the Sheriff, to address any news releases that concern the operation of the Valencia County Sheriff's Office, these may include ongoing investigations; information concerning victims and arrested suspects. The Sheriff may designate specific personnel to address questions from the news media on a specific incident or operation.
2. The public information officer is responsible for:
 - a) Assisting media personnel in covering new stories at the scene of incidents.
 - b) Preparing and distributing agency news releases;
 - c) Arranging for and assisting news conferences;
 - d) Being available for on-call responses to the media;
 - e) Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning victims, suspects, and witness;
 - f) Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning on-going investigations and operations.

B. NEWS MEDIA REQUIREMENTS AND PRIVILEGES

1. Members of the media may not resist, obstruct or otherwise interfere with a deputy in the lawful execution of his duties. The mere presence of a member of the media, the taking of pictures or the asking of questions does not constitute interference.

2. Deputies shall not restrict the movement of members of the media, unless their actions clearly and directly interfere with agency functions or investigations, or compromise the safety of personnel at the scene.
 - a) Still photographs or film footage may be taken in or from any area which media members have been given access. Deputies may restrict the use of flash, strobe or high intensity lighting when such illumination might hinder an investigation or compromise the safety of personnel at the scene.
3. Agency personnel shall not compel prisoners to pose for photographs or film footage. However, deputies are not to interfere with photographers or cameramen photographing or filming prisoners from public access areas.
4. Members of the media are not exempt from any federal law, state law, or any local ordinance. They are dealt with in the same manner as any other violator if arrested.
5. No member of the media shall have any property confiscated, nor be threatened with confiscation, without due process of law. This includes camera, film, audio recording devices, notes, etc.
6. Because most of the media maintain a police scanner and are aware of our calls at all times of the day and night, calls may be transferred from communications to the shift supervisor. The shift supervisor will contact the chain of command and/or the public information officer for direction. Calls from the media that come directly to the sheriff's office during duty hours will be referred to the public information officer or the Sheriff.

C. RELEASE OF INFORMATION

1. In cases of a death, the name of the deceased shall not be released by agency personnel until next of kin has been notified.
2. Certain information may not be released in an ongoing investigation if it may compromise the investigation. Determination of certain information that will not be released will be made by the primary investigator and the division commander.
3. Release of information will be in compliance with the agency access to records policy.
4. Media submitting a request for public records will be referred to the Valencia county custodian of records. Fees and time limitations will be made in accordance with NMSA 14-2-1.

D. MUTUAL OPERATIONS

1. Media requests for information on incidents involving actions initiated by another agency will be referred to that agency.

2. Media requests for information on incidents initiated by the sheriff's office with assistance from another agency will be handled by the public information officer or Sheriff.